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HB 1464 RELATING TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Statement for
House Committees on
Energy, Ecology and Environmental Protection
Water, Land Use Development and Hawaiian Affairs
Public Hearing - 28 February 1981

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HB 1464 would consolidate the environmentally related programs and functions of various state agencies into a single new department of the environment. This statement on HB 1464 does not represent an institutional position of the University of Hawaii.

HB 1464 has been introduced in short form. Ordinarily the Environmental Center does not review short-form bills. However, the general discussion which has transpired recently on related environmental bills, leads us to offer comments on HB 1464 which if expanded would surely further modify the responsibilities of OEQC.

Environmental functions, expertise, and responsibilities are widely disseminated among many State agencies. Certainly the Department of Land and Natural Resources in its direction of the use of conservation districts, parks, fish and game management, and innumerable other environmentally related functions has widespread environmental expertise. The Department of Health has broad responsibility and expertise with regard to environmental concerns such as air and water quality, particularly as they relate to public health considerations. The Department of Planning and Economic Development also has the need for environmental expertise. Other agencies environmental responsibilities could be cited. In each case the fulfillment of the responsibilities of each of these agencies would be significantly affected if their environmental expertise were to be removed from their jurisdiction and placed in a separate department as is proposed by HB 1464. We recognize that there exists a need for greater interagency environmental coordination and direction so as to eliminate duplication of effort, expedite and economize the environmental review process, and assure uniform compliance with existing environmental regulations. While a separate environmental department could assist in certain aspects of this need, it could not be expected to have the broad range of expertise that would be required to effectively advise and direct all the environmental responsibilities attendant with

the operations of other state departments. Each State department must have a certain level of environmental expertise within the department in order to work intelligently and efficiently in the planning, management, and enforcement of its statutory responsibilities.

It would seem more appropriate and cost effective to expand the existing role and responsibilities of OEQC to develop and strengthen interagency cooperation and coordination of environmental review and expertise. Guidance by the legislature could further clarify and facilitate the implementation of OEQC's responsibilities.